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SUBJECT: NIGERIAN ORGANIZED LABOR: THIRD STRIKE, BUT NOT OUT

REF: A. ABUJA 1117  
[B](#). ABUJA 821  
[C](#). ABUJA 809

[1](#). (U) Summary: The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and other state labor leaders conducted a large rally in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, on June 23, protesting the GON's deregulation of the petroleum sector, and lack of action on minimum wage and electoral reform issues. The Borno demonstration is the third in a series of planned protests throughout the country focusing on these themes (ref B and C describe the last two protests in Lagos and Kano). The NLC's planned protest rallies in Benue and Oyo states, as well the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), will likely move forward as announced. Meanwhile, the GON remains unresponsive to NLC demands. This latest protest rally once again highlights Nigeria's fractured labor sector and its inability to improve the lives of Nigerian workers. End Summary.

[2](#). (U) NLC Borno State Chairman Garba Ngamdu told LabOff that the demonstration was a "big success, with close to 20,000 people in attendance." He added that at first, the visible presence of several police was intimidating, but as their march made its way to the Government House, the police did not interfere. Borno State Government Permanent Secretary Hayatuddeen Baba Omar told LabOff that he agreed with Ngamdu's description of the demonstration, and also described the protest as "very peaceful." The protest rally was televised the same day, supporting claims that it drew large numbers, particularly as others joined in after the march to the Borno State Government House. (Note: A large police presence could also be seen on television both during the NLC march and afterward surrounding the growing crowd. End Note.)

[3](#). (U) According to Ngamdu and NLC General Secretary John Odah, the rally's objective was consistent with the previous demonstrations in Lagos and Kano -- to draw attention to the GON's unresponsiveness to NLC demands for higher wages, the cessation of petroleum sector deregulation plans, and the full implementation of their electoral reform recommendations. The GON issued no public response to Kano and Maiduguri protest rallies, but Minister of Labor and

Productivity Adetokunbo Kayode has stated to the press several times and told the Ambassador in April that the GON cannot afford to pay higher wages.

¶4. (U) Nigeria's other largest coalition of unions, the Trade Union Congress (TUC), was absent in Kano and Maiduguri. (Note: As a confederation of white-collar, management level workers, TUC's membership is largely concentrated in the southern commercial capital Lagos and oil-producing Delta states. End note.) However, TUC's silence in the media and limited public support for NLC's protest rallies has also been evident. TUC President Peter Esele told LabOff on June 24 that while the TUC agrees with NLC on the issues of wages and electoral reform, the NLC's position on deregulation "does not enjoy the full backing of workers in the oil industry to which many TUC members belong." He explained that "any discussion on deregulation must come with pragmatic solutions, but the problem with NLC's strategy is that it has an abundance of complaints, but no solutions." Esele did note, however, that the NLC and TUC are working hard to "fine-tune their cooperation" for a more unified voice.

¶5. (U) Comment: The Maiduguri protest rally was likely the most successful of the three NLC protest rallies in this series held thus far--if success is defined by attendance alone. So far, the GON has not responded to the NLC's demands other than set up "committees" or ad hoc dialogues. In addition, Nigeria's two largest union confederations have divergent strategic interests and the private sector seems eager to dissociate itself from both government and organized labor altogether. Combined, such discordance within

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Nigeria's labor sector, (which we specifically noted from the dramatic incongruence in ideologies among government, organized labor, and the private sector at Nigeria's Labor Summit on April 23; reftel C) are further examples of how the lack of a functioning tripartite social dialogue interferes with the ability of Nigerians to address their differences. Meanwhile, the quality of life of the Nigerian worker is worsening as the minimum wage at the current rate of exchange is worth little more than a dollar a day while the cost of fuel and food continues to rise, the combination of which creates ripe conditions for future protest rallies to gather momentum nation-wide. End Comment.

¶6. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.  
SANDERS